THALIA

the SPACE issue

September / October 2018

Editor's Note

The idea for Thalia was born in January 2018 out of a desire to empower women in creative spaces. In April, Thalia made her online debut as a forum for female artists and writers. This inaugural issue marks a new phase in Thalia's (still young) life. We are striving to create more space for female creatives, to push dialogues across different mediums, and to bridge physical gaps by highlighting shared experiences and ideas.

Since Thalia's inception in January, space has played an odd, even fickle, part in facilitating collaboration and feeding inspiration. At times we, Thalia's founders, were physically separated by the Atlantic Ocean. At others, we spent days at a time living under the same roof. Since the start of this project, each of us picked up and moved thousands of miles from where we began, condensing our lives into suitcases and fraying cardboard boxes (we're still finding receipts and subway cards from faraway places!). All the spaces we have occupied, beautiful and ugly and surprising, have expanded and contracted, overlapped and separated. And most of all, been impacted by the people who occupied them.

We live in an age when movement is easy and physical space seems increasingly surmountable as technology challenges the power of physical space to cultivate relationships. Although in most cases, we at Thalia have never shared spaces with you, our readers and contributors, we have come to know you through your emails, messages, calls, and most importantly, your work.

We've sat in your plastic chairs and seen your milk-white windows—you've shown us seafoam and circuses and riverbeds. We've shared a great deal with you. Now we invite our readers to do the same.

The Women of Thalia

“I have like, the best trophies”

Verity O'Connor

"My intention is to create an unsettling, claustrophobic and voyeuristic atmosphere to form a dialogue around abuse of power and power dynamics between men and women."

Location: Haslemere, England

I explore social and political issues through oil painting and drawing. Through my practice, I want to explore the effect that politics has on women, through changes to healthcare (particularly in America), attitudes and stigma towards rape and sexual assault, and laws restricting women's bodily autonomy.

I create imagined interior spaces, in which I place figures or reflections of figures in mirrors or on television screens. My intention is to create an unsettling, claustrophobic and voyeuristic atmosphere to form a dialogue around abuse of power and power dynamics between men and women. Certain objects are placed within the works to provide implicit suggestions as to what might be happening. However, the drawings and paintings are purposefully left slightly ambiguous to allow the viewer to come to their own conclusions.

My practice is heavily inspired by film and within my work I try to create my own cinematic compositions. I am particularly inspired by Alfred Hitchcock, David Lynch, and Rainer Werner Fassbinder.

The artists currently inspiring my practice include: Juno Calypso, Ida Applebroog, Kiki Smith, Francis Bacon, Michaël Borremans, and William Kentridge.

Do what I want

When you're a star you can do whatever

Wendy Chen

"As an Asian American woman, I am committed to writing that reflects the experience of Asian and Asian American women."

Location: New York, United States

As an Asian American woman, I am committed to writing that reflects the experience of Asian and Asian American women. That commitment has led me, in part, to translating Chinese poetry a space dominated by white, male writers translating other male writers. Li Qingzhao (1084-1151), considered the greatest female poet in Chinese history, attracted me not only for her vibrant and breath-taking imagery, but also for her courage in writing at a time when women were discouraged from the craft. I hope my translations will bring new appreciation for the elegance and beauty of her writing, which still shines even after almost a thousand years.

I am the author of Unearthings (Tavern Books) and editor of Figure 1 (thefigureone.com), an online poetry journal featuring work from underrepresented voices. My work has appeared in Crazyhorse, Rattle, and A Public Space, and I am the recipient of the Academy of American Poets Most Promising Young Poet Prize.

Translating Li Qingzhao

You, from outside, look in
past the bamboo screen
blue with night,
the sheer curtains
layer after layer,
to where she is sleeping
on top of the blankets,
furrowed, red as a peeled cherry,
to where she is waking—

waking, sitting up
on the bed, walking
sitting again in the chair,
shining like a mineral
in the candlelight,
the fertile gleam
of her eyes, her hair
still bound up
in its nautilus curls,

letting each one down now,
plucking out the gatherings
of the day, the long stretch of year:
the cold twigs collected
from the glossy banks of the river,
the drunken flowers
from underneath
the eastern fence,
the scorching voices of the geese
as they leave.

Always, she thinks,
always, the geese are leaving.

See how she arranges them,
on the table,
their little vowels.
Her fingers, precise as scalpels.
The fine hairs on her knuckles,
swept forward,
like yours.

Uncork the bottle of wine by the elbow,
sweet rice wine, sweet and cloudy,
pouring out from mouth to mouth.

In Praise of Humiliations

In Praise of Humiliations

they discuss at their conferences the dynamics of inequality
devote an hour a timeslot or two

their skin glows bluely white their teeth

we watch from our seats a distance

it will not be me could it be you

one among us placed in their histories
how could it be me be you

no name no face to put a name to

at night what I have felt nurses against me
woundedness shame minor humiliations
how I longed to have their hair their lives

now each year I cultivate my humiliations

pray they bud on me like the sprouts of an old potato
and while I sleep let me grow my eyes

Confessions

By Li Qingzhao, translated by Wendy Chen

Fragrant plum blossoms by the pillow

Night came, and I drank.

I was undoing,
late, my makeup.

The plum blossoms had withered
in my hair.

As I sobered,
their fragrance pierced
my spring dream.

My dream broke,
unfinished.

Now, voices are quiet
and the moon lingers.

Blue screens hang down.

I keep crushing
these withered petals,
drawing out their remaining scent
to keep a little longer.

Fragrant Courtyard

By Li Qingzhao, translated by Wendy Chen

Fragrant grass by the pond.
Green shadows fill the courtyard.

Evening.

The cold passes through
the window netting

The jade latch. The gold lock.
Has a visitor arrived?

No, I sit alone,
with a bronze jug of wine,
troubled, at the ends
of the earth.

Can anything last?

The blackberry roses
have fallen and gone.

At least,
the pear blossoms remain.

In the past,
we admired the flowers.

The fragrant smoke of the incense
filled our sleeves.

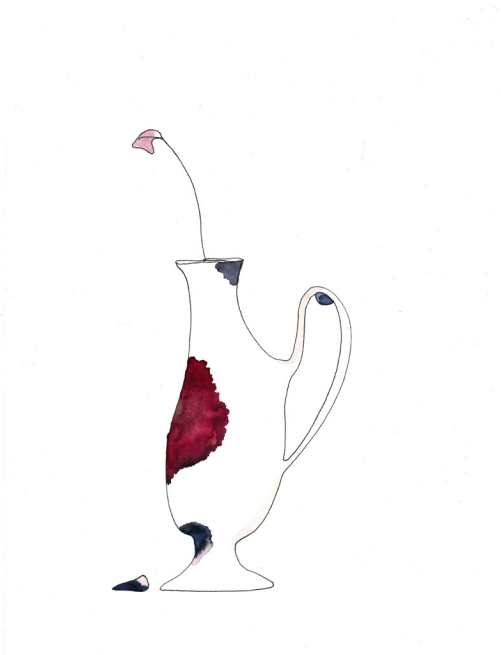
We lit fires,
served tea.

Carriages passed
like running water.
Each proud horse
a dragon.

Then, I did not fear
the wild wind
or sudden rain.

It was enough
to heat the wine
and watch the falling petals.

Now, I cannot hold you.
These days are far
from the ones before.



Lush After Dark

Lush 21

Kaylee Dalton

"I am curiously inspired by the ambiguous world beneath the soil of tangled roots, bulb and earthly formations.

Location: Indiana, United States

I focus on the fascinating consistency of new plant growth and the expressive characteristics natural forms exude. I am curiously inspired by the ambiguous world beneath the soil of tangled roots, bulb and earthly formations. Beginning with an encaustic monotype, I collage parts of hand-painted papers, ink drawings and occasional textiles, creating a whimsical interpretation of lush, abstract landscapes. I strive for strong textural differences reflective of the various surfaces found in nature.

Midnight Lush No. 13

Midnight Lush No. 14

Semiarid 6

Ginnie Gardiner

"For a painting to maintain the intimacy and the initial intensity of the original study or idea is always the challenge for artists, because time and scale are elongated and magnified."

Location: New York, United States

We artists use various rituals help us to engage with our materials and to stimulate our creative processes. The most absorbing aspect of my studio practice is the process of translating my color study: creating what I call an 'equivalent palette' that is keyed to the larger scale of the canvas.

Mixing pigments and making color adjustments as I develop the painting from the study involves optical decisions concerning which pigment combinations will work physically in knitting together the oil paint surface on the canvas.

For a painting to maintain the intimacy and the initial intensity of the original study or idea is always the challenge for artists, because time and scale are elongated and magnified. This is the most exciting, demanding and absorbing aspect of painting for me.

Conceptually, my paintings are a combination of lines and colors that become logical wholes, with all of the elements essential to the design.

The initial inspiration for this series came from my years of studying Josef Albers work, and his 'Homage to the Square' series that was inspired by his trips to Mexico from Black Mountain College in 1946, with his wife, the extraordinary textile artist Anni Albers.

Tableau 2017 Mixed Media Collage

Tableau 2018 Mixed Media Collage

Maya 2018 Mixed Media Collage

Melissa Stein

"I'm fascinated by the ways in which lushness of language can intersect with and complicate disturbing subject matter, challenging our senses or beliefs."

Location: California, United States

Many of my poems speak of fragility and power, our longing for connection, the contradictions of desire and pleasure, the bruises we bear. I'm fascinated by the ways in which lushness of language can intersect with and complicate disturbing subject matter, challenging our senses or beliefs. Many of my poems feature women struggling to stay safe, find their way, and find their strength in relationships, family structures, and beyond. All of this takes place within the wider framework of the natural world's violence, both ordinary and sublime.

Melissa Stein is the author of the poetry collections Terrible blooms (Copper Canyon Press) and Rough Honey, winner of the APR/Honickman First Book Prize. Her work has appeared in Ploughshares, Tin House, Harvard Review, New England Review, American Poetry Review, Best New Poets, and others, and she's received awards and fellowships from the NEA, Pushcart Prize, Bread Loaf Writers Conference, Yaddo, and MacDowell Colony, among others. She is a freelance editor in San Francisco.

Wheel

Why do I keep hearing
dryers spinning?
Everything's gone
warm and sweet.
Life's a container
we're tumbled in.
Time the container
life's tumbled in.
Space contains that,
and maybe it's the planets
careening across some galaxy
that make it so hard to breathe.

Milk

The nurse has made up the bed so crisply.
Tucked the corners' origami
soundly into the aluminum frame.

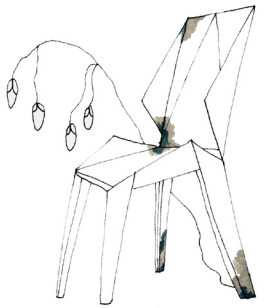
Your lips glisten, moistened with a square
of sponge. I hold your hand—weightless
thing of parchment and twig—

no more your daughter than a seed
cast from hoof-split rattlegrass, no more than
an asterisk sprung from thistle, caught, wished upon,

let go. I inhale the antiseptic scent of bay,
of balsam. Rooted here, in this cheap plastic chair,
as if I'll miss something,

as if my missing it would matter.
Just as—branch-snap to feeding deer, wing-shadow
to the scuttling mouse—it has always mattered.

The window frames a square of light
white and blameless as milk. I turn from you
and drink, and drink, and drink.



Lo Mead

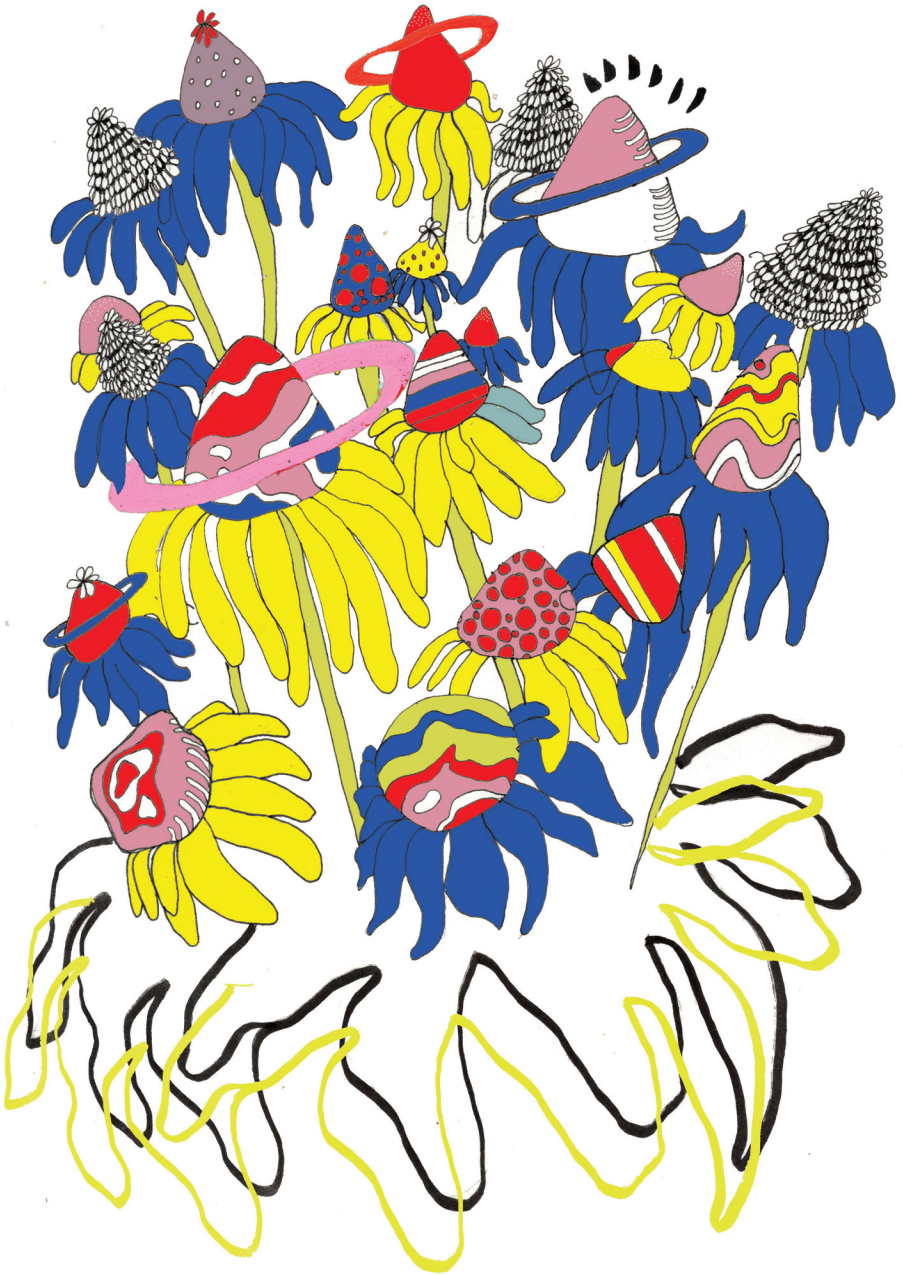
"I love focusing on the natural awkward mannerisms of an individual and really bringing that to life."

Location: Massachusetts, United States

I work with line, pattern, and color to emphasize my concepts and inspirations. I use art not only as a creative outlet, but also a way to tell stories and solve problems.

I'm inspired by the natural human body. I love focusing on the natural awkward mannerisms of an individual and really bringing that to life. All my work is a little piece of my mind. When I'm drawing for myself, I tend to think that I am releasing my thoughts and emotions onto the paper to either figure them out or let go of the control they have over me by adding a little touch of humor and color.

For "space", I settled on the concept of the search for life or other alien worlds. I have taken the word space and included both outer space and negative space.



Brazoria

Kit Porter

"I have had a lifelong relationship with the coastal environment..."

Location: Texas, United States

This body of work explores beauty and destruction of the coastal environment as experienced from a distance, and up close. Utilizing the aerial perspective for composition and memory, abstract landscape paintings of the coastal environment portray distance and disconnection from the environment.

Materials found within the coastal environment including aluminum, cloth, rope, wood and plastic, are assembled to explore the up close experience of a coastal environment littered with marine debris. By removing oneself from the coastal environment, by seeing it from above, what is the experience? By immersing oneself in the coastal environment, what is the experience? These paintings whether up close and personal, or distant and removed, reflect my emotional response to the beauty and simultaneous destruction of the coastal landscape.

I have had a lifelong relationship with the coastal environment, combing beaches around the world during my travels, paying particular attention to the beaches I have lived near in Southeastern North Carolina, the Lowcountry of South Carolina, and the Northeast of Scotland.

I received my Bachelor of Fine Arts in painting from the University of the South in 2005. In addition to creating my own art, I have held positions in various sectors of the fine art world locally and internationally.

an interview with
Rachelle Cunningham

June 23, 2018

Paris, France

Interview and photographs by Amelia Haney

A sun-drenched studio nestled in the back of a vine-covered courtyard in Paris' Marais neighborhood is home to a lingerie-designer-turned-fine artist who spends her days musing over the female form. I know, it sounds too dreamy to be real.

I had the privilege of meeting Rachelle Cunningham while studying at Parsons Paris and despite her dreamlike home and spirit, Rachelle has both feet planted firmly in practicality. Rachelle's work has been universally celebrated by her personal following and our Thalia readers. From whimsical fashion illustrations inspired by the French designer with nothing short of a cult following, Jacquemus, to her abstract paintings of the human body, the city of romance has filtered through Rachelle's work.

I had the pleasure of meeting Rachelle while making my annual baguette pilgrimage to the city closest to my heart. She welcomed me into her home on a hot summer afternoon and I was instantly submerged in her everyday fairytale.

Can you talk me through your process of what inspires you, how you begin a piece, how it evolves, and when you decide it's done?

My entire creative process and inspiration is an extremely personal journey. When I start to create a piece it's about expression and it's therapeutic to me. Everything is based on emotion. It needs to be expressive. Most of my work is focused on the body—mainly the female form. I've struggled with health issues for many years, which at times were debilitating, uncomfortable, and ultimately transformative. My work that is focused on the human body is a direct translation of the emotional stress and the difficult experiences I have had with my own.

I get really annoyed when I'm finishing a piece. It's an extremely emotional process of creation where I routinely flip between hot and cold of loving and hating it.

Do you go through phases of working with one medium or subject matter in particular? What's your preferred subject/medium now?

I go through phases all the time, sculpture, experimental film, interiors, painting… right now it's acrylic paint and ink.

Each of Rachelle's forms feeds so organically into the next—from her exquisite portfolio of lingerie designs I fawned over in class three years ago, to the delicate lines in her fashion illustrations and the feminine details of her apartment decorations. Every form is a little intimate piece of the woman sitting before me, telling her story.

Explain one of the challenges of working with your medium. What's something you want people to experience when they interact with your work?

I want people to feel. I think the beauty of art is that you can get a different feeling every time you experience a piece. There was a moment during an exhibition of my work that a woman approached one of my pieces and exclaimed "Wow!". It is incredible how one word can have such an impact—that moment truly embodied everything I want people to experience with my work. I want people to feel the emotion behind it.

Describe your ideal space to create in?

Sitting on the floor of Rachelle's sun-drenched studio, covered from floor to ceiling in her current commissions, so quiet I could hear the rustle of the leaves in the trees in the courtyard, I knew the answer to the question the moment I asked.

This. I think it's the first time in my whole life that I'm so content. Body, mind, soul, environment. And what more could I ask for? I have a Botticelli sculpture in my courtyard!

What's the highest compliment someone could pay you?

The highest compliment someone could pay me is to choose to hang my artwork in their home. That someone appreciates it enough to want to see it every day means so much to me.

What brings you peace? What keeps you up at night?

Lavender. Lavender makes me feel at peace. My head keeps me up at night. If I'm feeling inspired, I'll just get up and paint or draw no matter what hour it is.

Are there motifs or symbols that you find yourself frequently returning to? Why?

I continue to return to the human body, mind and spirit. Having had health issues of my own, I've come to see and interpret the body in a very different way than I did before. There's a deeply physical aspect that has always been in my artwork.

If you have seen most of Rachelle's work, you'll notice the palette she returns to again and again is filled with muted nudes, reds, and greens. With her flaming red hair, bright piercing eyes, and petal-pink skin, her color scheme is a literal representation of the colors of her physical attributes.

How does your work interact with the here & now?

My art is a reflection of me and where I am in this moment. This style is where I am right now but it could change at any moment.

What's your personal paradox?

People may not assume this but I'm a very bubbly, light-hearted person! That side of me just isn't depicted in my art, which tends to be slightly more serious.

Who's your girl crush?

Emily Ratajkowski. She loves her body and posts whatever she wants and has so much self-confidence and self-love.

Heather Bourbeau

"Much of my inspiration comes from my experiences and travels for work as a United Nations consultant."

Location: California, United States

Much of my inspiration comes from my experiences and travels for work as a United Nations consultant. I have written in Madagascar, read in Tunisia, worked in Liberia, and wonder where I will explore next.

My fiction and poetry have been published in Alaska Quarterly Review, Cleaver, Eleven Eleven, Francis Ford Coppola Winery's Chalkboard, The Stockholm Review of Literature, and the anthologies Nothing Short Of 100: Selected Tales from 100 Word Story and America, We Call Your Name: Poems of Resistance and Resilience (Sixteen Rivers Press).

Russian Sex geckos (2014)

The Russians are at it again—
pushing boundaries like it's
Brezhnev and Czechoslovakia,
extending presidential terms and
making animals cosmonauts.

I watched that Wall come down,
that heaviness of red button mishaps
lift from our collective shoulders,
apocalyptic nightmares mute momentarily.

But, now as we watch planes shot down,
borders crossed, rebels amass
and lizards jettisoned into space,
it seems so 1968,
it seems, as Ms. Bassey sings,
"Just a little bit of history repeating."

It's all short skirts, flattened hair chic,
and Bond villains seem slightly less ridiculous
as I imagine Vladimir stroking a white cat
after wrestling a bear, bare chested
with smothered laugh through dilated nostrils.

And so many hands on so many buttons,
but no need to think about the flash boom damn
when you have Laika's legacy to distract.

It was a straight male scientist dream—
four girls, one guy, and space.
Who needs Barry White or Molly
when you have a view of Earth
and a world of nerds and hipsters
ready with the band name,
rooting for your copulation?

It's all in the name—
Goldfinger and Pussy Galore knew that—
perfectly branded to help us forget.
And as the five floated, maybe flirted, then froze,
We did, we forgot,
forgot eastern Ukraine (and Ferguson),
forgot familiar fears,
forgot for a moment
that "the joke is rather sad,
that it's all just a little bit of
history repeating."

Salt & Cedar

Back room,
long tables,
wood and dirty dishes,
computer open,
toast forgotten,
sentence undone.

Taste this, you offered—
a teaspoon fresh
of buckwheat honey
followed foolishly
by star thistle.
(Remind self to never follow
such strength with
such delicacy—to allow
some subtle to shine.)

I envied the perfection
of the small world
you had borrowed:
muted light
presses, plotlines,

work welcomed as
air to be breathed,
to burrow deeper
into the rhythm of language
immigrant learned,
explored aware,
in a way
mother tongue minds
cannot.

Introduced Monday,
paper feel,
textures and types,
words played and paraded
on Friday.

Now I am wondering,
why is 'I' capitalized
in English?
And what took me so long?
What is the point of waiting
to learn
buckwheat's beauty
only to leave?

Lisa V Robinson

"I look to the outside world for ideas for composition and mark making, such as; mid-century/world interiors, architecture and films."

Location: Wakefield, UK

My work is underpinned by an interest in mark making, colour and form. Rather than purely reverting to abstraction as a method of visualising these interests, I have developed my own painting style which fuses abstract and figurative elements.

I look to the outside world for ideas for composition and mark making, such as; mid-century/world interiors, architecture and films. These images are then deconstructed and placed on the paper as abstracted components. The reference material is used until a certain point, and then the remainder of the painting is finished intuitively.

Abstract Interior

Cecilia Fiona

"I want my works to tell a story of vulnerable moments clinging on to the safety of familiarity, creating a peephole into another space."

Location: Copenhagen, Denmark.

I grew up in a small village in the countryside, drawing from the moment I could hold a pencil. I want my works to tell a story of vulnerable moments clinging on to the safety of familiarity, creating a peephole into another space. A space where contrasts meet. Love and obligation. Dream and reality. At this moment, my works revolve around a longing for freedom, but fearing losing everything if you let go.

Bhanu Kapil

"...I wanted to make a poem like a rope."

Location: Colorado

I think of this poem as a form of social chanting, but also self-talk. A way to keep lighting a strange fuse. I think of creativity as related to shakti, which is like a rope that rotates and descends, so I wanted to make a poem like a rope.

Social Chanting

Cordial, revenant, panicked, shitty.

No.

Cordial, revenant, pavanine, shitty.

No.

Cordial, revenant, pandering, shitty.

No.

Cordial, relevant, pandering, shitty.

No.

Trying to remember the four words that "downloaded" (from where?) as I came up the road towards my house. I chanted them up the path. But can't quite get them now. They are four political words. They are the words I associate with this particular day. The words describe something. They are four gates into thinking about something else. Let me try again.

Cordial, remnant, pavanine, shitty.

No.

Cordial, resonant? Cordial, relevant. Cordial, revenant.

Yes.

Pavanine.

Maybe.

Shitty.

Yes.

Cordial, adamant, Betjeman, shitty.

I can't take a step in my life without thinking of the book I have not written yet and yet which [that] my life is for.

This is my public notebook and so I can write the book here, even on days that are orange and pink, that are tossed out of the thick cable, like sparks, towards the grass at 7.43 p.m.

I can do this again and again.

Keep writing.

Stop writing.

Immigrant writing: a stage in which I inhibited the writing, stopped it from being written*, in the same way I turned away from love when it was offered to me on (quite literally) a plate.

No, I said.

Cordial, revenant, panting, shitty.

*Or read.

Cordial, relevant, pre-uterine, shitty.

I can't quite get it.

Let me try again.

Sookie Brarou

"The creative process is always unique in the sense that scales, cuts, and hues are worked until the image fragments feel like they were meant to be assembled."

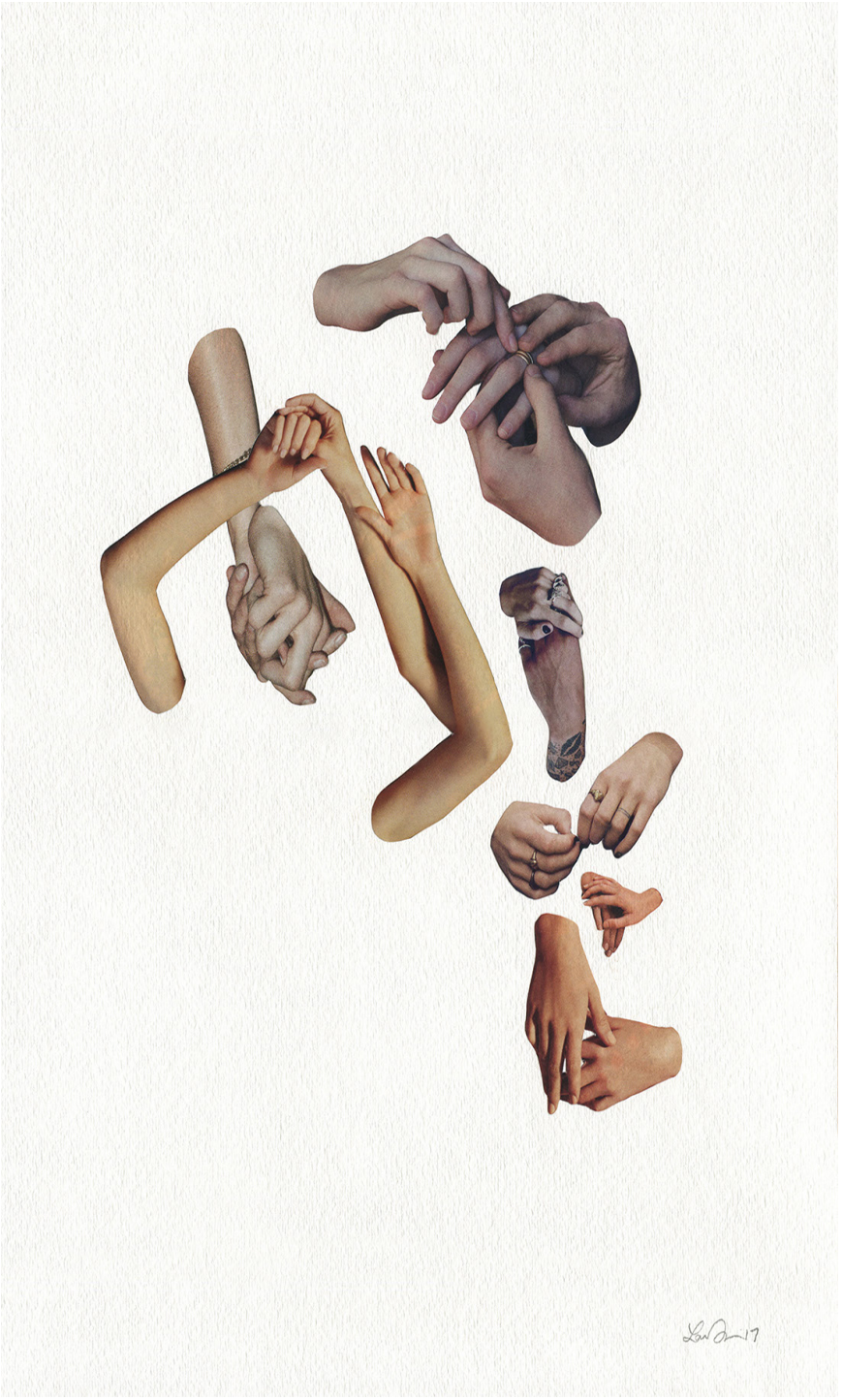
Location: Brussels, Belgium

Engineer by training, I discovered collage four years ago when an architecture teacher asked me to reproduce urban landscapes using old magazines and scissors. I immediately fell in love with the process and started combining digital editing and drawing.

I like to decompose and recompose scenes, to play on scales and confront image fragments coming from divergent contexts. My inspiration comes from my daily life and I identify my works with those of Sammy Slabbinck, Robert Doisneau, and Pamela Pinto.

I don't always know what a collage will look like before it is finished. The creative process is always unique in the sense that scales, cuts, and hues are worked until the image fragments feel like they were meant to be assembled.

melting heart



Dance Darling (right), Extension Study (above)

Lauren Munns

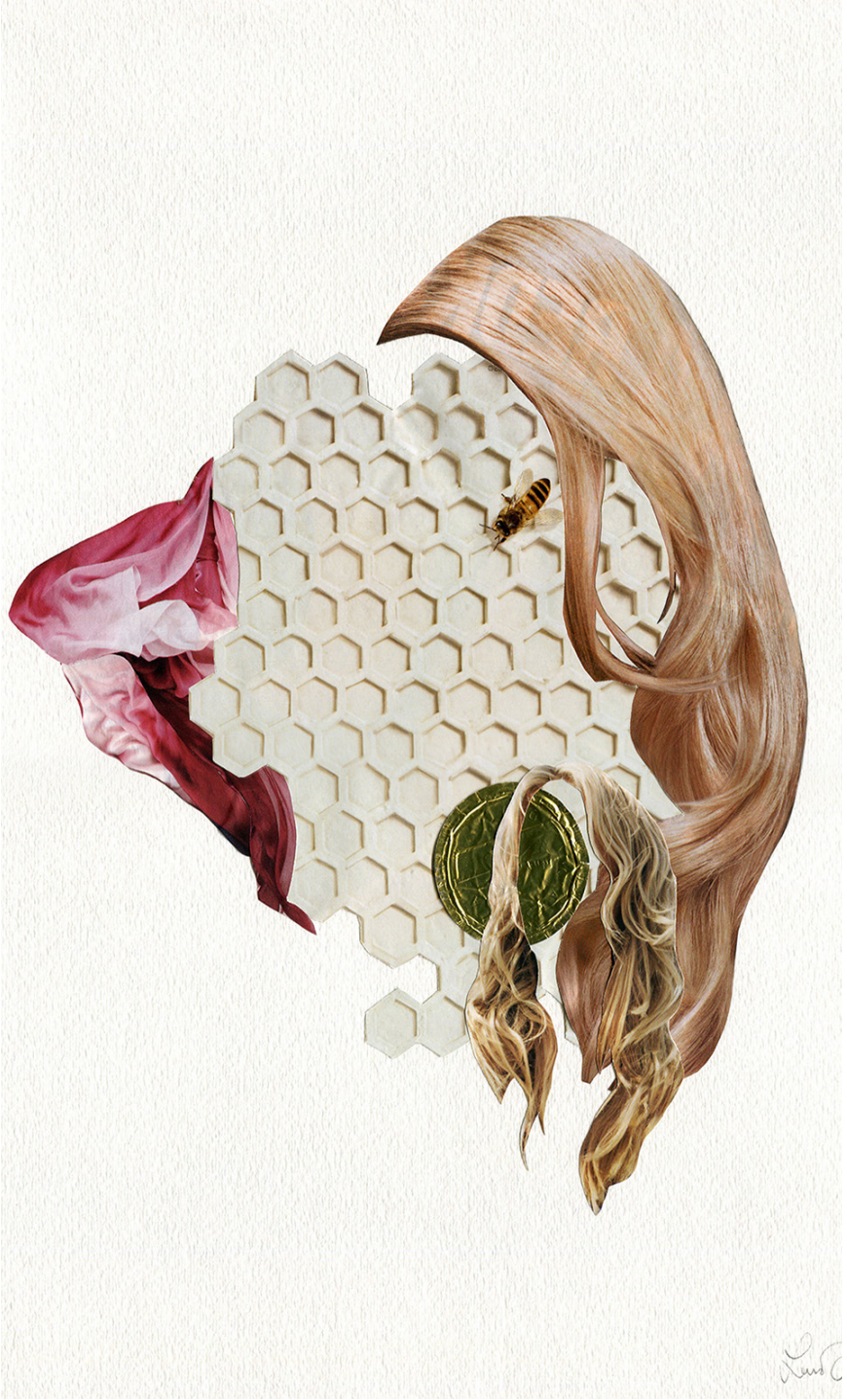
"My work explores ideas of femininity, growth and absence."

Location: Florida, United States

Working with traditionally "feminine" colors and textures, I manipulate the female body to create abstracted forms that challenge tradition and cultural norms. Isolated and unexpected, these pieces create new conversations of "where did we derive from", "what are we", and "where are we headed".

I hone in on the small details and makes them the focus of my work—the detail of a fold behind a knee, the curve of an arm in an embrace, a cowlick. My work explores ideas of femininity, growth and absence.

The inkblot collages that I primarily work with are incredibly process-based. They are just as much about the assembly and evolution as the final product. I find it almost impossible to know how parts will interact with each other until everything I have cut is scattered across my desk (or floor, if we're being honest).



Untitled Hair and Hive

THALIA submissions

Thalia is building new spaces for female creatives to create, collaborate, and share work. We are looking for fresh voices across and beyond fiction & poetry, creative nonfiction, and visual arts.

For more information please visit:
https://www.thaliamagazine.com/submissions

Questions? Email us at contact@thaliamagazine.com